

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

May 29, 2020

Commissioner Suzi LeVine
Washington State Employment Security Department
212 Maple Park Ave. SE
Olympia, WA 98501-2347

Dear Commissioner LeVine,

Thank you for your work to implement the expansion of unemployment eligibility under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed by Congress and signed into law by the President on March 27th. We would like to call your attention to a group of vulnerable individuals who are continuing to struggle to apply for unemployment: Washington residents without internet access or technology to apply online for unemployment benefits.

We understand and appreciate the great workload your department has been given to implement new programs and meet increased demand. And while technology can help with that, many of our constituents continue to struggle to apply for benefits.

The CARES Act expanded unemployment eligibility under the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program for individuals who do not regularly qualify for unemployment insurance, including self-employed individuals, independent contractors, and folks who do not meet the typical 680-hour requirement. This provision, as well as the provision that extends benefits to individuals who have exhausted their unemployment benefits by 13 weeks, are vital to ensuring people are able to sustain themselves and their families while they cannot work during the stay-at-home order.

With the unprecedented increase in phone calls to ESD, many constituents who attempt to apply by phone are not able to complete their applications. ESD has done extensive work to enhance its online system, but for many of our constituents, applying online is not a reality. This is especially true for seniors, lower income individuals, and those who live in rural areas. These residents must be able to access the vital unemployment benefits lifeline during this time.

We would like to know the steps ESD is taking to ensure that individuals who are without internet access and/or are unable to apply online are given the necessary tools to receive benefits. We look forward to your response outlining the actions being taken to bridge the technological barrier for these vulnerable residents.

Sincerely,



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress



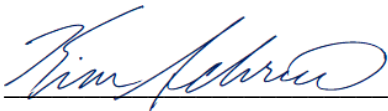
Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



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